important facts burns are treated with the recitation of the "Our Father" (Lord's PRAYER) when the phrase "as it is in heaven" is reached, they point with their finger toward the ground as if to show the disease in which direction to leave. Many superstitious actions have to be performed on certain religious holidays; for instance, the unmarried girls take after the midnight mass on Christmas Eve a mouthful of holy water home from the church and wash their faces with it before going to bed. It is believed that the persons who appear in their dreams to wipe the water from their faces will be their future husbands.

771 [755] 789 796 531

Most of the countless superstitions of the Magyar peasants have their international equivalents, especially those which can be traced back to Biblical sources (the ill fate connected with Friday or the number 13) and also others of the following varieties:

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Those connected with iron and its production, such as horseshoes bringing luck, and magic actions with iron tools which avert mishaps and natural disasters and which can be used against the evil influences of others (rontis 'bewitching') and for healing of animals.

Parts of the human body or anything connected with it represented, to the primitive mind, the entire human being, hence the great mass

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766 a real wife would. Moreover, the mock bride as well as her family consider themselves relatives of the deceased.

796 The Hungarian popular calendar follows closely, in its present form, the Christian calendar, although in many holidays which have a perfectly liturgical appearance pagan customs survive. The heavy pre-Christian influence is indicated by the fact that the most colorful and strange customs are connected with the movable feasts which roughly coincide with the quarters of the year which, in pagan times, were celebrated.

There are also days in the popular calendar which have become generalized among the peoples as "learned superstitions," i.e., as a result of the "didactical" verses taken from Medieval calendars which associated certain phases connected with agriculture with the feasts of the saints in the liturgical year.

The <u>ieles napok</u> 'important days' from the point of view of the peasant may be grouped as follows: (a) days on which work is forbidden for men or women or both, (b) days on which women cannot light a fire, (c) days which forecast the weather for the next forty days or four moons, (e) days especially favorable or especially unfavorable for

certain agricultural activities. For these and others, see A magyarság néprajza, Vol. IV, pp. 323 ff. 796

The New Year's Day customs are varied from region to region; "burials of the winter" and "drivings out of the winter" exist in different forms. In the region of Somló, for instance, a young man lashes an old man through the main street. 796 789

Epiphany (Vízkereszt) is considered a day favorable to exorcism. The initials G+M+B (for Gáspár, Menyhért, Boldizsár--the three Magi) are chalked on the door-lintel by a priest or by the master of the house.

Carnival merrymaking culminates at Shrovetide when special doughnuts (farsangi fánk) are served. During Lent, the Catholic population observes fast and abstinence; however, cooking with pork grease is tolerated by the Church, since this is practically the only shortening familiar to Magyar homemakers. Passion Week has also many popular customs, e.g. the burning of an image of Pilate (pilátuségetés). Good Friday is celebrated by the Protestant population with great fervor. At Easter, colorful hand-painted eggs are presented to friends, while young men of the village sprinkle the girls with perfumed or plain water. In some regions, the maypole is erected 796 [785]

796 at Easter instead of on May first.

[208] March 15 is the anniversary of the 1848 revolution. ~~It~~ is today being celebrated by the Communists (along with May 1 and April 4 [Liberation by the Red Army]), who have adapted the anti-Hapsburg sentiment of the day for their anti-Western propaganda. No popular custom is connected with March 15.

[526] At Whitsuntide the youth of the village elects, after horseback riding and athletic competitions, the pünkösdi király, the king for a day, and his queen.

June 29, the feast of the apostles Peter and Paul, opens the harvest season.

[372] On Midsummer day (Szentiván, 'St. John's Day') a Saint John's fire is lit in many Hungarian villages, especially in regions which have come under strong Germanic or Slavic influence. The villagers sit around the fire and sing, while the girls jump over the purifying fire, thus assuring themselves a future happy married life.

August 20 was formerly the day of Saint Steven, first king of Hungary. Before World War II, it was occasionally connected with the gathering in of the crop and thanksgiving ceremonies. Today, its celebration in the old form is forbidden; the government pro-

claimed it, instead, the Day of the Constitution (of the People's Republic). 796

October 31, Reformation Day, is celebrated by the Protestant population. On All Souls Day, November 2, the population honor [769] the deceased, visiting graves and lighting candles on them.

At Christmas time, nativity plays are performed (cf. Sub-paragraph 11)[1] by the youth of the village (betlehemesek) and gifts [431] are exchanged. The custom of the Christmas tree has begun now to spread out from the cities where it has been most common.

Special family holidays are birthdays, saint's days and, in winter the day of pig slaughtering.

The daily routine of the Magyar peasants is quite simple: 512 during the months of increased activity, i.e. from May to October, they get up early, about 4:00 A.M. and feed the cattle and domestic animals before having breakfast themselves. At 6:00 or 7:00 A.M. they go out to the fields where they work until noon and then eat the lunch which they carry with them. Except in Transdanubia, women [462] also go out to the fields so that the villages of the Great Plains look deserted in daytime during the season. Shortly before sunset, the peasants return home to feed the animals and have their dinner.

1 [see cat. 116, pp. 106-107 -- Analyst]

nótafa and mesefa respectively, are the villagers' and the folklorists' delight. 517 538

Folk drama. Folk drama assumed much greater importance some time back than it does today. It has ramifications in several branches of folk customs, especially in those connected with weddings where the entire ceremony, lasting several days with the active assistance of the village, could be conceived as a play. To a certain extent, the more elaborate ceremonies connected with birth and death contain many dramatic elements, as do certain children's plays. 536

Folk drama in the more restricted sense is nowadays performed by children only. Among them, nativity plays (betlehemezés) are the most common, and this custom has spread even into the capital city. Nativity plays have countless variations. As a rule, they are performed by groups of teenage boys who play the following roles: the kengyelfutó 'runner' guides the troop and secures admission into the houses; two "angels" who carry the betlehem, the nativity scene made of painted papier-mâché and clay and lit with candles; there is 536 796 883

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Saint Joseph, Herod, the King who is the leader of the troop, and several shepherds. The carols which are sung and the actual staging of the play differ from region to region but generally follow such a general scheme as, first, an introduction and greeting of the host, the annunciation, Joseph's search for shelter, the adoration (often comical) of the shepherds, and, finally, the leave-taking and the blessing of the house. Often marionettes take part in the play. The medieval sources of the Hungarian nativity plays were the marionette and mystery plays.

On Epiphany, plays similar to the nativity plays, but less common, are performed with the visit of the Magi as their subject. In these, one of the performers operates the ugrós csillag 'the jumping star,' a star made of shiny paper and mounted so that it can be suddenly raised or lowered. The shepherds of these plays wear sheepskin coats with the fur turned outside, possibly reminiscent of the early animal costumes of primitive plays. Others wear white linen costumes similar to ecclesiastical habits and tiara-like paper head gears.

Less common are the Gergelyjárás play, a student

536 Less common are the Gergely járás play, a student
796 recruiting play performed in some places on March 12, Saint
857 Gregory's day, formerly the day on which school began; the Balázsolás, on February 3, the day of Saint Blasius, patron of children; and the Pünkösdölés, a Pentecostal play featuring the election of a queen for the day.

The children performing these plays collect gifts of food from the host at the end of their performance.

535 Folk dancing. Among the group dances of the Hungarian peasants, round dances are performed today only by children and unmarried girls, and are very uncommon among the men. Women never dance the single dances, which are reserved exclusively for men.

The most important types of single men's dances are the dance of the best man (vőfély), rich in improvisations, a few sword or stick dances, and herdsmen's dances. The latter feature crouching dance steps similar to those of the Cossacks. The most famous men's group dance is the verbunkos, or recruiting dance, which is characterized by quiet and graceful movements. The round dance is just one of the many figures in

778 795 at least a dozen other local churches, e.g. Szeged-Alsóváros and Hajós, which attract the flock not only of the village but also of the neighboring regions on account of certain powers that are attributed to their saints.

[788] The pious peasants often plant crosses at the crossroads and at the boundaries of their villages; when they pass by, they sign themselves with the cross. Larger towns feature calvaries (kálvária), open air representations of Christ's sufferings which are visited by the faithful especially during Lent.

576 771 The sayings common among the peasantry also reveal their deep religiousness. Greetings, for example, of the jó napot 'good day' type are always returned in the country with adjon Isten 'may God grant you.' The greeting Dicsértessék a Jézus Krisztus - Mindörökké, amen is very common among the Catholic peasants; it is of purely ecclesiastical origin, a direct translation of Laudetur I. Ch. - In aeternum, amen. Moreover, all of the more elaborate types of greetings refer to God and are actually derived from blessings.

796 795 Processions are common among the Catholics. On major holidays, especially on Easter and Corpus Christi Day, the clergy and the faithful march through the main streets of the town, carrying square gonfalons with pictures of saints, candles and the Holy Sacrament, singing hymns and praying. Before harvest time, a procession goes out to the fields where the blessing of the crops takes place with the assistance of the whole village. Processions

nowadays, are often prohibited by the local Communist authorities or simply limited to the square around the church or even to the interior of the church. 795 [796]

The Protestants, besides worshipping on Sunday in their church, often gather in their homes in the evenings and read the Bible, sing hymns, and tell pious stories. [771] Hungarian folklore is rich in legends and tales of which a common subject are the wanderings of Christ among the peoples in the company of Saint Peter. [538]

The celebration of the Catholic parish feast is an occasion for joyous festivities in which the non-Catholic inhabitants also take part. [796]

Intermarriages between Catholics and Protestants are frequent in spite of the restrictions imposed by the Catholic Church which require a reversalis, a document in which the non-Catholic party agrees that children issuing from the marriage shall be brought up in the Catholic faith. [585]

Although there are no permanent sects in Hungary that preach healing by faith, men and women who claim to have charismatic virtue and to heal through laying on of hands and prayer arise occasionally among the peasants and acquire a local and short-lived renown. They are called javasember or javasasszony. 756

With the 1945 land reform and later decrees, the Catholic Church has lost its large estates and even the land owned by local parishes were partly 659 793

9: Eppstein S-4 (no date) 1945 EC1 Hungary EC1

verted by the Western Church nearly 1000 years ago, and ever after considered herself as standing under the special protection of Rome.

This tradition is still alive, even in politics. The Holy See concedes to the King of Hungary, who bears the title of Apostolic King, special rights which it claims for itself in other countries, and has exercised its influence in favour of Hungary on many occasions. In return, the Catholic Church enjoyed a specially privileged position in Hungary up to modern times; and, although all the chief Confessions are to-day nominally equal, the Catholic Church is recognized as the senior among them. There are three Roman Catholic Archbishops of Hungary—the Archbishops of Esztergom, Kalocsa and Eger. The first-named, who is in fact always made a Cardinal, is the head of the Roman Church, and one of the most important figures in the country, particularly when, like the present Benedictine Archbishop, Cardinal Seredi, he is a commanding personality.

The Hungarian Succession Law provides that the King of Hungary, as wearer of the Holy Crown, must always be a Catholic. The chief national festival is St Stephen's Day (20 August), and the most venerated of all the national relics is the Holy Crown. Next to it comes the Sacred Right Hand of St Stephen, which was found preserved, in a mummified condition, about a century after the Saint's death, and is carried in procession every St Stephen's Day through Budapest with a dazzling array of gold-broidered vestments, uniforms and traditional costumes.

The Church is one of the largest landowners and

10: Viski E-4, 5 (no date) 1932 EC1 Hungary EC1

The Three Kings of the Epiphany

«Now in his cart, now in his shoes», — is a Hungarian proverb used in the district around the Tisza; it is merely a joking variation of the Transylvanian saying: «The wheel turns round and round under his sole»; and this in its turn merely means that fortune is fickle. In the «Songs of Bethlehem» poor Joseph begs «a nation harder than a rock» to give him a lodging; his entreaties are addressed to King Herod. Thirteen days later somewhere in the Hortobágy three kings beg poor Hungarian shepherds to accommodate them... This is the feast of the Epiphany.

Kaspar, Melchior and Balthazar. They are the three kings! They wear white robes and white mitres and in their hands they hold long sticks, with bells on their top. Like the «singers of Bethlehem» and the minstrels they beat time with these sticks.

They follow the Star towards Bethlehem... Though in this case the Star is merely a miserable sieve, with transparent paper stuck over both sides of it, on which many stars glitter in various colours, but especially resplendent is: the Star. The Star is carried before them either on a long pole, or on a kind of trellis which is pushed out or pulled in with a scissor like contrivance. It is usually King Kaspar who holds the pole under his arm. The sieve is fixed to the end of the pole as on an axis and, if King Kaspar twists the «universe» with his second finger, then the firmament, lit up from inside, revolves on its axis...

Only when they have already entered the room do we notice the black King Balthazar... Against his white robes and white mitre his face is as black as pitch. He was not mean about the amount of soot he applied!

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●796 In the Hortobágy country, around the great pastures, the kings start their songs with a reference to the shepherds :

Gay shepherds, gay cowherds,
Even the springs are bubbling
How lovely this night is !

Look, there, over Bethlehem
I see a shining light !
There a star slipped down,
Stopping over a miserable barn . . .

In other parts of the country the song is of course different, and at the end of each verse the Star is poked out towards the audience :

Now that this star appeared
Where is the King of the Jews?
We shall praize him with songs,
And with rejoicing poems . . .

There are certain parts of the country where girls go about with the Star instead of boys ; of course their accompaniment and their songs are also different . . . They are dressed in white and their hair falls down their backs . . . Their leader is usually an older woman. — In a few places, when in their beautiful attire they have solemnly acted the part of the royalties, they eventually end up with a little parody :

On this day, on Three Kings Day,
Two gipsies quarelled hard.
Both have been drowned in a pie,
One last night, the other to-day.
This happened because the pie was sticky,
And the gipsies were surely dippy !

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Customs of Saint Gregory's and Saint Blase's days

857 It is no great compliment to be called a «knight of Saint Gregory's» in Hungarian... as Pope Gregory's knights are merely «tiddlers» amongst men:

As young trees
In an orchard,
Children and good boys
Are brought up
By God...

[776] Saint Gregory as well as Saint Blase are the patrons of children and teaching. The troupe of schoolchildren, who go round the houses singing on Saint Blase's day (the [794] 3rd of February) and on Saint Gregory's day (the 12th of March) are the army of these saints... They are also dressed like soldiers with shakos and wooden swords... And so that everyone shall be sure of this, they sing:

I'm a soldier,
I stand on my heels,
I look around proudly
And gnash my teeth:
I know I look frightening...

But we are not as easily impressed as all that, even though they brandish their swords, they are only the envoys of saints... They recruit for their school the children who want to play truant; occasionally they even collect financial support for their schoolmaster. They like to copy the military forms of real recruiting. This is no wonder, as on few other occasions in the Hungarian past did such beautiful

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s: Storks on the house chatter,
What is not of linen may be of leather.
One armchair is not a box,
Charles the 9th may yet live long!

But enough of all this teaching, and of the «a b : ab, and all the rhymes, the best we can do is to wait for the presents and then, in the words of Saint Blase's soldiers: «In God's name, let the whole crowd of us go next door!» It is high time that:

e, d : ed : our poem shall be finish-e-d ;
we can't dally here any longer,
we have to hurry on ;
e, d : ed : The Name of Jesus be bless-e-d !

Easter customs

796 [785] The Hungarian word for Easter «húsvét» means the eating of meat, that is to say the time when people stop fasting strictly. On Shrove Tuesday people give up eating meat and it is only at Easter that they take to it again — and very glad they are to do so. In Catholic districts the fasting rule is taken very seriously ; it is particularly hard for those who do not live on rich food anyhow. Even apart from Lent there are many more days in the year than there are sausages in their larder. Towards the end of [262] Lent Prince Cibere («cibere» is a cabbage soup, a poor Lent dish) declares war on King Marrow-bone : the thin fasting soup on the good marrow-bone, fasting on satiety, human patience on human desire... The fight is already decided before Easter : according to popular custom on Palm Sunday. The Prince and the King measure their force twice every year : on Shrove Tuesday and on Palm

796 Sunday. On Shrove Tuesday Prince Cibere wins; at Easter King Marrow-bone, or, as he is called in other parts of the country, King Bone would be the victor, but the people settle the fray as early as Palm Sunday. A Hungarian poem of the 18th century already refers to the battle of Shrove Tuesday; then Prince Cibere took over the government, while Duke Marrow-bone lay prostrate on the ground for fourty days.

[789] Prince Cibere is a doll, made of rags and straw. They carry «him» through the village singing happily and at the end of the village he is either burnt, or drowned, or thrown over the village boundary. Shameful is his death and enormous the joy caused by his passing:

Villő! Villő! At the end of the village is a silken tent,
Let us sing there as merrily as at other times,
Villő! Villő! Let's carry out the *Kicevice*
And bring back the bone and marrow, villő! villő!

[262] The *Kicevice* means exactly the same thing as the cibere, at least as far as its merits go. Its other name is «*Kisze*», which is a fruit soup or a kind of paste made of oatmeal and leaven, and it is eaten during Lent with milk, honey and water or plum sauce. It is a very poor Lent food, — small wonder that it is carried out of the village with such joy... This joy is thus worded and expressed in other parts of the country:

Out with you *Kisze*, out with you,
Out you go, *Kisze*, out! out! out!
Come in ham, come in quick,
Come in ham and dumplings big!

[789] Popular belief has it that with the banishment of Prince Cibere, that is the «kisze», all illness and trouble, measles and such like are expelled from the village. The procedure is also supposed to help against hail.

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789 Sometimes the friendly appeal and the threat of consequences in case of unrightous behaviour follow each other in the lines of a verse :

If you have a drink from it,
May it become you well ;
If you steal my flask,
May you break your neck.

Some of the flasks are made in the shape of a cross or prayer book. A squat, earthenware «book» explains its origin in the following line :

This is the daily devotion of Joseph Papdi.

This kind of pagan epigram sounds very much like blasphemy. But if we ask the profane Hungarian carefully whether he is not ashamed of the horrible words with which in his bitterness he curses heaven and earth, he reassures us with absolute conviction :

— «It does not go to the same place as our prayers !»

Superstitions of Saint Lucia's day

796 December the 13th, Saint Lucia's day, is the day popularly dedicated to a whole collection of superstitions. It is 12 days before Christmas, and thus precedes the feast by the same number of days as Christmas in the Gregorian Calendar precedes the Christmas of the ancient calendar. The popular name of this space of time is Saint Lucia's calendar, and the majority of the customs and superstitions of the winter solstice have crowded together on this one day, as the witches do on Sylvester's night on Saint Gregory's hill in Buda...

754 Speaking of witches, we should like to add that it is
789 just on this unfortunate 13th, Saint Lucia's day, that we can, if we wish, see witches face to face... If anyone

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ing song», which is sung to this day, and by the notes of the above mentioned preacher. This is what the song says about love and the sun:

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When I think of you
My beautiful one,
Then love *flames*
Up in me.
Fire *flashes, the sun shines;*
Before his dazzled eyes
Roses blossom
And lilies bloom.

And finally this is what the above quoted protestant preacher wrote in 1629: «They used to lay a Saint John's fire in the middle of the village. Then they sat around it and spun. But we made them give up this custum.»

Thus the winter spinnery harbours amongst other things the tradition of a pagan Midsummernight feast, which fled into its precincts for protection against the Christian concept of life...

Plays of Bethlehem
Hungarian marionettes

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The Bethlehem players appear at the same time as the minstrels, in most places at Christmas, on the 25th of December, when the sun has its resurrection and gets stronger, and when the days begin to lengthen. Ever since ancient times this has been a great feast: the joyous, loud pagan feast of the Sun, that is the Sun-god. It is the beginning of a new year, of new hope, the recurring expectation of new light, new warmth, new life... Paganism awaits the new Sun, Christianity the birth of Christ... Is it an acci-

796 dent that these two feasts happen to co-incide? Not at all. The ancient Sun feast, the day of the winter solstice was declared to be the feast of the birth of Jesus only in the 4th century, as there is absolutely no indication in the New Testament of its actual date. The synods and the church fathers of the Middle Ages were busily occupied with the pagan customs of that day, and suddenly they issued the following order: «No one shall dare to represent a calf or a stag at New Year» — we may add that our minstrels are doing it to this day; — or they went into explanations: — «Good Christians do not worship the sun, either on the 25th of December or at New Year, but the One Who brought the sun with Him.» We also get an answer to the question why these two feasts had to co-incide: — «Christ had to be born on a pagan feast, so that those who indulge in pagan superstitions shall blush.»

Just as the Church fixed the birth of Jesus on the birthday of the Sun-god, so it also endeavoured to replace the pagan customs connected with that date by new, ennobled festival games... The substitution was successful. In a thousand years the meaning of the ancient pagan game became obliterated and, in the words of the Bible, those who still practice it literally «do not know what they do». But as though the «ancient festal joy of the pagans» were still alive in the present games of Bethlehem, they sing:

Oh life! Oh sunshine!

But the song does not continue to praise the Sun, as was once the case; this is its present gentle form:

Oh dear Jesus!

Though Jesus Himself is the new sun,

«... which Balaam saw once upon a time,
Shining like a lovely sun on the sky.»

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Pilgrims returning from the East were the first to speak of the ancient «Bethlehem». They said that in Bethlehem the remnants of the manger in the famous rock cave, could still be seen. In the 7th century Pope Theodosius had all these relics brought to Rome, and it is since then that the custom developed of building little «Bethlehems», that is rocky caves, in the churches, in which carved wooden kings, shepherds and animals pay homage to the Child. Later on real people began to replace the dolls, and gradually festival plays developed around it. When these plays began to become profane, Pope Innocent III. banished them from the churches in the 13th century, — that is to say not the «Bethlehems», but the dramatic performances which had been acted around them, — and prohibited the priest from taking part in the acting of such festival plays. But his contemporary, Saint Francis of Assisi, who loved nature and tamed animals, raised the «Bethlehem» from its discredited position. He took it out into the forest near Greccio, where in the naturalistic scenes of the touching picture of Bethlehem, around a real manger, scented hay and rustling straw, tame live animals were his caste, though they could not always be relied upon to take their «cue» at the right moment. The two orders founded by his followers, the Franciscans and the Clarissas, built a real stall and around it constructed a beautiful rocky landscape.

These two famous orders made this «mistery» popular whereever they established themselves with their convents. In the 14th and 15th centuries this charming play is already acted in the vernacular of the people, not in church, but in the streets, townhalls and under the arcades of the market. In many places the towns arranged these representations at their own expense, like the Easter Passion plays. Amongst the Hungarian towns, in the accounts of Pozsony these expenses already figure in 1440 and in those of Bártfa in

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796 1497. In the Saint James church of Lőcse the beautiful wooden figures, carved for the «Bethlehem» by Master Paul of Lőcse, the famous sculptor, can still be seen. In the churches the «Bethlehem», stripped of acting, still lives, even the marionettes of Bethlehem occur, also remnants of medieval church customs.

This is the past of the Bethlehem games, which at present are played by the people, mostly only by the children; it shows the interesting development of that opponent of the winter solstice games, which had been called into life to destroy them.

796 883 The dramatic plays, like the marionettes of Bethlehem, also live to this day in certain villages amongst the people, that is really amongst the children. Even a mild church play still exists according to which, on Christmas night the children take a beautifully decorated little Bethlehem into the church, place it on the altar and, there before it, they act the present day form of the games of Bethlehem, with all the verses and songs which go with it. Such is the custom in Transylvania, in certain villages around the river Nyárád.

The plays of Bethlehem are performed in practically every part of the country, with their text more or less rounded off; even in Budapest tiny bands go from house to house with modest «Bethlehems» and modest songs!

The songs and plays have many variations; the tunes are mostly alike, while the texts, the plays and the costumes are very varied. In the West the songs and the acting are short, towards the east these get longer, while the fullest words and tunes are found in the Catholic Szekler districts of the county of Csik, which used to be Hungary's most eastern county. There the acting is also most serious and they adhere very conscientiously to the ancient church and school text. Especially in the Protestant districts of the Great Hungarian Plain the sepherd scenes have grown out

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of proportion, and in some places there are even comic shepherd plays, in which merely a slight memory of the ancient mysteries still glitters. It is interesting that in some places not boys, but girls, led by an older woman, go round with the «Bethlehem». In the picture we see such a group. Keeping to the most typical amongst the many variations. we will give a short description neither of a Szekler, nor of a Catholic play of Bethlehem, but of one practiced in a Calvinist village.

Seven boys, aged 14 to 16, make up the caste: the King, that is Herod; Joseph; the runner (that is the envoy); two angels, two shepherds. The terrible king is dressed up as a Hungarian hussar: he wears red trousers, a blue dolman, a fur cape thrown over his shoulders, a hussar shako adorns his head, a curved sword hangs by his side, boots with big spurs cover his feet... The two shepherds wear fur coats touching the ground, the fur turned outside; they hold big sticks in their hands, and have sheepskin caps on their heads. The others are usually dressed in white, their mothers having given them the white skirt and the blouse, and they wear both on top of their ordinary clothes. A bright coloured ribbon is tied around their waist and a fine, high paper cap, decorated with bright coloured paper chains, covers their heads; Joseph has a broad, wooden sword, like that of a headsman; the runner has a big stick, which is covered with bright coloured paper, besides this, tiny bells are fastened to the top of it. The Bethlehem is a light, wooden, church-like structure, decorated with brightly coloured paper and long paper chains; it is done as well as the children can possibly do it. A candle burns in it; it lights up the floor of the Bethlehem, which represents a green sward, the holy pictures on its walls, the carved wooden animals around the stall and the Child in the manger. The two angels carry the «Bethlehem».

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883 The runner goes ahead and in beautiful rhymes asks permission for his party to enter the house! If they are welcome, they go in (only Joseph stays out) and the Bethlehem is put down on two chairs. The two shepherds lie down in front of the Bethlehem and sleep... The others begin to sing:

An angel from Heaven
Has come down to you
Shepherds, shepherds!
Hurry at once
Towards Bethlehem
And you shall see, you shall see
The Son of God
Who was born to-day
In a stable, in a stable...

At the end of the song, Joseph speaks from outside and, as a tired traveller, asks to be let in. King Herod gives orders to the runner to see «who dares to knock at my door with such courage in his heart». Joseph, still from outside, says what he is doing:

At the order of King Herod
From Nazareth I came for the census,
So long as I don't get a lodging,
I shall not go away.

With the help of the runner, negociations start between the king and Joseph. The cruel king gradually softens and lets in Joseph. Joseph then tells the great news, that «in the manger of an ox a child has been born» who is the Saviour Jesus... The listeners are amazed, especially at the fact that the Saviour has been born in a manger... Therefore they ask Joseph, of course in the form of a beautiful song:

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But Joseph what did you think,
When you chose a stable,
Could you find no other resting place
In this town?
Did you prefer the company of cattle,
And the manger for the Child?

Then, waking up the shepherds, the whole troupe sings together:

Let's go, let's go, let's rejoice,
Let us try to please our Lord Jesus,
Let's respect Him as our Lord,
Let's respect Him as our new Lord!

The shepherds kneel down, they offer the Child a cheese and a lamb, and mingle a few shepherd's jokes with their respectful words... Then they all get up and sing together, announcing the birth of Jesus in a stable, in a manger amidst cattle, where «the mouths of calves are his warming stove...» After that the king blesses the house in which they were welcomed, not omitting to wish the girl «a priest who'll have to perform the marriage ceremony over her...» Then comes one more beautiful song:

A beautiful rose has budded
The whole world expected it for so long:
In Bethlehem a green twig sprouted:
It is a king; His Majesty was brought from Heaven,
It is a king; His Majesty was brought from Heaven!
When the Virgin wants to lull
Her babe to sleep,
Her son crying in the manger,
This is what she sings for him:
Oh life, oh sunshine,
Oh dear Jesus,
Oh life, oh sunshine,
Oh dear Jesus!

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883 At the end of this long song, — having collected a few, modest presents — they say good night and press the door handle . . . The runner sprints ahead, to find a new house where they will be let in. The bells on his stick form a rythmical accompaniment to his steps . . . With it he beats the time of the songs too . . . As we hear the gradually vanishing sound of his bells, his gesticulations and his ancient noisy instrument, they remind us of the noise made by the minstrels and, even beyond that, of the ringing, droning, equipment of the Shamans . . . The shepherds' coats, their fur turned outside, remind one of the mimes representing animals . . .

Into what a beautifully gentle form the winter solstice games were transformed from their ancient paganism . . . What a beautiful song they sing on the day of the solstice : «Oh life ! Oh sunshine ! Oh dear Jesus !»

But the performers of the Hungarian Bethlehems also preserve the memory of the Bethlehem marionettes which were shown in medieval churches. They act the scenes of Bethlehem livening and spicing them to the great joy of the youthful public ! In some places these marionettes are made to dance in the Bethlehem, in front of the manger, as though to entertain the Child Jesus. For this purpose a special Bethlehem is needed, in which the figures can be moved from below. In other places the marionettes move just outside the Bethlehem. In one place the marionettes are : the devil, the chimneysweep, two shepherds, one performer called «Lackó», a Hungarian peasant, an actress called Jutka Marinka and the bell ringer, in other places : two shepherds, Death, Herod, the bell ringer; Joseph, and the devil. Sometimes we find a few other figures as well, but they are not very different. Now let us see something of this charming game: in one village in the upper Tisza valley, the marionettes of the shepherds' dance each time the Bethlehem performers

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sing . . . When the five shepherds lie down, the marionettes do the same thing. When the chorus urges the shepherds to start for Bethlehem because the Saviour of the world has been born, «You'll find in the manger — covered with chaff — a tiny Child — O halleluja !» — the marionette of Herod appears and says : — «I am Herod, the King of the Jews, I know no Lord over me, I am not even frightened of Death». The doll of Death appears : «Come, come Herod, are you sure you are not frightened — even of Death?» Herod (the marionette) backs in terror . . . Death snarls ar him : «Don't edge away ! It is no good, you are already mine ! Bang Herod!» And the marionette of Death knocks off Herod's head. Now the devil appears, he beats and spits at the doll's head of the cruel king, then he throws Herod out of Bethlehem and he himself also retires. When the older shepherd says good bye in the name of the Bethlehem performers, and also asks for some tiny present, the marionette, representing Joseph, the bell ringer, also appears, and he also has a request : «Give a few pennies to Joseph the bell ringer for candles !» It is not in vain that he wears a big wallet at his side . . .

Candles are needed in the Bethlehem, so that their light may vibrate and flicker in the snow covered nights of quiet Hungarian villages. This is the point at which the once enchanting mysteries have arrived from the resplendant altars, the grand halls and proud vaults of colossal domes . . . They returned to the place from which they once started : to the tiny villages of poor peasants, shepherds and farmers, to the badly lit abodes of humble folk like these.

Well then good farmer,
Now that you start us on our way,
God's blessings shall
Fall onto your house,
God's blessings shall
Fall onto your house !

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CALENDAR CUSTOMS

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The substance of Hungarian peasant celebrations is the holiday spirit, which finds its outward expression in the fact that people put on the treasured Sunday best, go to church to pray, eat their festive meals in their whitewashed homes, drink the fiery Hungarian wines, make merry and sing and dance.

We have described the dress, the songs, and the dances of the Hungarian villagers. Let us now throw a quick glance at the occasions of these peasant celebrations, which are occasions not only of purely formal interest but are full of meaning at all times. They actually embrace the most important movements of life; they are the events which in their incessant flow form humanity; the dates which mark the coming and going of the seasons, the happenings on which the well-being, the existence of the Hungarian village itself depends.

To the uninitiated, some of these ancestral customs might have the appearance of mere superstitious practices. In fact, they are filled with a deep symbolic meaning, connected with the primitive wisdom of countless centuries. They all fit into an unwritten ritual and follow one another in an unending cycle year after year. In our descriptions here we have also chosen to follow the course of the seasons throughout the calendar year.

*[See category 116, pp. 9-74--Analyst]
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527 796 We mention in our description a good number of the most typical ones, but one should not think that all are celebrated everywhere. That would mean that the year in Hungary is nothing but an endless celebration — which it definitely is not. Some of the customs on our list characterize this region or profession, some, again, another. What they all have in common, though, is the feeling, and that quality of the genuine which is the truest feature of the Hungarian village.

In the Hungarian village, the New Year greetings are conveyed not only with empty words but by expressive symbolic acts. The old year is "burned" or "chased out", and the New Year is "rung in"; that is, it is greeted with joy and celebration amidst the pealing of New Year bells. One of the most interesting of the surviving New Year customs is "turning the herd round", practised particularly in North-eastern Hungary. Groups of young men go from house to house in the village, and, amid shouts and the cracking of whips, behave as if they were turning the cattle round and driving the herd out to the pastures. The symbolism of this act is evident at the turning of the year, when the cycle of life begins anew. It is no easy matter even for the best of herdsmen to turn a herd of cattle round; it is only just, too, that the role of the herder should fall to the cleverest lad in the village.

796 On the sixth of January, Epiphany is celebrated. Water is blessed in the parish church, after which the priest and his ministrants make the turn of the village to bless the houses with holy water. In various parts of the country groups of young boys or girls representing the three Kings of the Epiphany go from farm to farm, carrying on a pole the miraculous star and singing the song of the Saviour's birth. They mark the doors with

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• 796 huge chalk letters "G. B. M.", in commemoration of the Magi; Gaspar, Balthasar, and Melchior. They are received and duly rewarded with food and small gifts by the villagers.

According to popular belief based on experience, winter ends about the twentieth of January. On this day, which is that of St Fabian and St Sebastian, the sap begins to rise in the trees, and on St Paul's Day the winter cold is supposed to break.

The events which mark the rebirth of nature become more and more numerous. The second of February is the day of the Happy Virgin Blesser of Candles, upon which, as the name implies, the blessing of the candles takes place. In an unusual ceremony on St Blaise's Day and on Schoolday (February 3rd and 10th) the twigs to be used for grafting are cut out while the children of the village masquerade in the streets as the soldiers of St Blaise, Patron Saint of school-children. In chanted poems they reclaim would-be truants for the alphabet, and for their efforts the villagers reward them with food and sweets. On Shrove Tuesday poppy-seed is sown, vegetables are planted, and the maize for the spring sowing is plucked from the cob. This is a long day both of work and of merry-making, in which every member of the family, the neighbours, and the farm-hands share equally. To make a heavy and tiresome task easier, jokes are told and merry songs are sung for the last time on this closing day of Carnival.

796 292 At the sound of the bells at midnight, the merriment suddenly ends, the gypsies silence their instruments, and everyone returns to his home. On Ash Wednesday the period of Lent begins, which finds its outward expression not only in the complete cessation of dances and games, but also in the fact that the merrily coloured

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• 796 [292] embroidered skirts of the womenfolk are exchanged for the sombre dark or brown, and the vivid bows in the girls' hair yield to the tempered shades of green and blue. This is also the day of farewell to winter. The season of rain and cold, personified by a trunk or a log, is banished from the village and is burned in the fields or drowned in the village pond.

The eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth of March are the days of St Alexander, St Josephus and St Benedict; they are the popular harbingers of spring who never come without "bagfuls" of summer warmth.

The twenty-fifth of March is the day of the Happy Virgin Grafter of Fruit-trees. The boughs cut on St Blaise's Day are grafted on this day, and the occasion is duly celebrated.

Shortly after, the herds are driven out to the pasture-lands, and even today this is connected in some places with quaint, superstitious practices. Across the gate of the courtyard an iron chain is spread, to "ensure" that the animals will remain welded to the herd as though secured by a chain. On the board bridging the ditch over which the cattle have to pass, an egg is placed so that the animals shall fatten as full and round as the egg. Elsewhere the herd is driven across the embers of birch faggots to purge it of all impurities.

On Palm Sunday colourful religious processions celebrate the Saviour's triumphal entry. In memory of this event pussy willow, gathered by the children the day before, is blessed and taken home, where it will be carefully preserved in the "Holy Corner" of the house until next spring. Perhaps it is even more important that the long, lean days of Lent have at last come to an end. Singing, dancing, and embroidered costumes are restored to their rights, and the straw

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*796 and rag effigy of Cibere, the Hunger Prince of trying fast-days, is burned, buried, or drowned amidst singing, laughter, and universal merriment. Spring has come to stay . . .

Throughout Easter week ceremony follows ceremony. On Green Thursday the first fresh vegetable of the year is eaten; the younger men walk all round the village to clean the wells on the green and in the fields. In some places on this night bonfires are lighted to scare away the Spirit of Darkness. On Good Friday the preparations for the Easter feast come to a close. Houses have been scoured and white-washed, the Easter cakes, filled with ground nuts and poppy-seed, have been baked, and the painting of eggs to be presented to the holiday callers has been done with painstaking care and with astonishing artistry. Cooking has also been finished, and the fire has been allowed to go out. It will not be lit again until the first chime of the bells of Holy Saturday. Holy Saturday is celebrated in every parish with a picturesque procession during which the ringing of church bells marks the miracle of the Resurrection. Thereafter fast is broken, and the families sit down to partake of the festive supper of Easter Eve. On Easter Sunday the villagers of some regions take food-baskets containing meat, bread, and eggs to church for blessing. Easter dinner is one of the most important feasts of the year. It is significant that the Hungarian word for Easter means literally "taking of meat", which strongly emphasizes the importance of the event after the endless fasting of Lent.

823] Traces of the old Easter Monday custom of ducking marriageable girls in the well are still to be found. This was supposed to impart the fertilizing power of water — an element of supreme importance to the cultivators of the soil.

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• 796 the soil. Today the girls are still thoroughly drenched in some regions; in others they are simply sprinkled with a few drops of perfumed water, which tends to tone down the original custom to little more than a faint memory of itself. Naturally, the number of well-wishers is most significant as to the popularity of a girl, and therefore, in spite of an apparent reticence, they are only too glad to endure what seems to be an ordeal. In return, Easter eggs, often called "red eggs" from the dominating colour, painted brightly and ornamented with delightful designs, are given to the boys. This gift of eggs is also symbolic: the egg is the seed of life, the symbol of eternal resurrection and fertility.

On St Mark's Day, the twenty-fifth of April, the touching ceremony of blessing the wheat-fields is performed. In Catholic villages the priest and his parishioners go in procession to the fields to perform this picturesque Hungarian ceremony amidst the ocean of waving wheat, chanting the invocation of the Lord's grace, "so that fog shall not strangle, hail shall not batter, storm shall not break, and fire shall not destroy the only hope of a poor nation." In Protestant villages fresh bread is offered to the Almighty with a prayer in evocation of his blessing. Farm-hands are engaged on St George's Day, the twenty-seventh of April, labour contracts are renewed, and the summer clothes, to be worn until St Michael's Day, September 29th (which is the paying-off day of farm-hands), are distributed and put on throughout the country. The months of April and May are the most beautiful months of the Hungarian spring. Field and forest are in blossom, and Nature fulfils the miracle of creation.

527 On the first of May the villages are decorated with green boughs and flowers. The boys of marriageable age,

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527 after having spent the night in merry revelry in the village, erect May trees — slender saplings of which only the crown is preserved, richly decorated with coloured ribbons, kerchiefs, and a variety of odd little ornaments — in front of the houses of their best girls. On this same day the May-walk takes place. The maidens of the village go out to the forest, where they break fresh green boughs which, like the May-tree, they decorate with ribbons, kerchiefs, and other ornaments. Afterwards, in pairs, the long procession of girls parades with graceful, rhythmic movements through every street in the village, singing traditional May-songs.

796 On the Day of the Ascension, which falls always on the fortieth day after Easter, the youngest boys and girls receive their first Holy Communion. The older people gather in procession to offer prayer before the village Crucifix and before every cross erected within the boundaries of the village.

The sixteenth of May is the day of St John, Patron of the waterways and their users. The waterfolk celebrate this day with a colourful procession of brightly illuminated flower-decorated boats, at the head of which, in the most elaborate setting, the statue of the Saint is carried. On the shores, thickly lined with admiring throngs, burning torches are erected.

Urban is the Patron Saint of the vineyards. This Saint's Day, the twenty-fifth of May, is celebrated in the vineyards with a colourful ceremony.

527 524 Although many warm days of the late spring have gone by, it is only after the feast of Whitsuntide that summer really begins. Whitsuntide is celebrated amidst great rejoicing and with ceremonial games handed down from prehistoric times from generation to generation. The original meaning of these games has become some-

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what faded, but it can still be clearly traced. In some regions the lads organize driving or horse-riding races, in others the roping of the bull is the attraction of the day, which is followed by the election of the Whitsun King, recalling the tournaments of old which gave the setting for the election of tribal leaders. The Whitsun King's symbolic reign lasts only from Sunday noon to Monday evening, hence the much-quoted proverb recalling the brevity and futility of earthly things: "short as the Kingdom of Whitsun".

The election of a Whitsun Queen is another relic of ancient rites, surviving in the form of children's games. In some villages the girls choose one of their own, whom they parade round the village as their deeply veiled Whitsun Queen. They sing merrily the words of the age-old Whitsun song:

> In a rose-tree have I grown
> On Red Whitsun's Day...

and perform little games which recall the invocation of fertility practised in a forgotten past.

Corpus Christi is the first Thursday after Trinity Sunday, and is known as the Day of the Lord. It is Hungary's great festival in honour of the Holy Eucharist. Open-air altars are erected on this day in various parts of the villages, and a procession, of which perhaps only the picturesqueness is greater than the solemnity, visits these decorated altars in ritual succession.

One of the most popular and most interesting of the festivals of the summer is celebrated on the Day of St John the Baptist, the twenty-fourth of June, popularly known as St Ivan's Day. Originally the great festival of the summer solstice, today it has descended to us as a midsummer night's dream which reaches

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796 its climax in the mystic dance round St Ivan's fire. In the open fields, under the stars, round St Ivan's fire made of fragrant woods and herbs, lovers are "sung together". There are a great number of St Ivan's songs in which this typical *motif* returns:

> May God send a slow shower
> To wash these two together,
> Like two golden twigs...

796 777 Popular belief attaches much importance to this fire-dance, which is the first of the many acts in the developing of friendship and love between boy and girl which will come to a happy end in the merry marriages of Carnival. One after the other the girls jump across St Ivan's fire, while the rest, dancing round the fire, utter the name of the girl who is jumping, together with the name of the boy whom they know that their friend has taken to her heart. If the jump is successful, there remains no doubt that the desired union of two lovers will come true before the winter is over. Often this dance is an all-girl affair, as if to assure that every girl may unveil her heart's desire without embarrassment. Of course, the boys learn the happy news early enough....

241 527 Soon after, on the twenty-ninth of June, St Peter and St Paul's Day, the wheat-harvest begins. From the point of view of the Hungarian peasant this is the most critical and, everything considered, most important event of the year. To understand the magnitude of the event, it should be remembered that in the Hungary of today, as always in the past, the mainstay of the people has been the yield of the wheat-crop. The lives of millions of farmer-families, countless farm-hands, and share-croppers depend upon a bountiful harvest, and it is

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527 wheat-harvest, the grape-gatherers prepare a huge bouquet of fragrant grapes, which they carry around the village or, when the harvesting is done on an estate, present to the landlord in a quaint ceremony. The presentation or the procession of the grapes is followed by the vintage festival, which is one of the merriest and longest of celebrations.

273 527 Wine is the national drink of the Hungarians, and this is clearly brought to light in the merry vintage song which tells that

> The Slovaks all drink brandy,
> The Germans all drink beer,
> The Hungarians drink wine only,
> The very best, my dear...

796 But long before the wine-harvest there are other red-letter days of great importance. On the twenty-sixth of July, St Anna, the mother of the Virgin, is honoured with picturesque Anna Fairs throughout the country. This fair is somewhat akin to the yearly fairs held on the day of the local Patron Saint, in which trinkets, sweets, scarves, toys, kerchiefs, trumpets, rattles, and teasers are sold from stands richly hung with coloured cracknels and beautifully decorated ginger-cakes, baked in the form of a heart, with a tiny mirror inserted in the centre upon which love rhymes are written in coloured sugar glazing, or baked in the form of a mounted Hussar or other favourite figures of Hungarian fantasy.

The fifteenth of August is the Day of the Assumption. It is also the first day of St Stephen's Week, during which the memory of Hungary's first King and Patron Saint is honoured with country-wide celebrations. The great week ends in the striking procession of the Holy Right Hand on the twentieth of August, which is

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• 796 doubtless one of the most impressive demonstrations of Christendom. Through the old-world streets of the fortress in Buda, the miraculously preserved Right Hand of the Holy King is followed in veneration by the foremost dignitaries of Church and State and by the picturesque delegations of the guilds and of all walks of life from town and country. A bright and unique note is lent to the procession of the Holy Right Hand by the presence of hundreds of village groups, men and women in their fanciful Sunday best, who have come to offer to the foreign visitors and to the citizens of the Hungarian capital the best samples of their art in the series of representations known as the Pearly Bouquet. Throughout the week, group follows group on the stage where, in a touching holiday spirit, one can witness and enjoy the most typical festivals of the Hungarians in the intense hours of a marvellous and never-to-be-forgotten afternoon.

The leaves begin to take on a shade of scarlet. The twenty-ninth of September is St Michael's Day, St George's autumnal counterpart; farm-hands and labourers receive their pay and the heavy clothes to be worn throughout the severe Hungarian winter. It is a fine occasion for celebrating.

The first of October is the Day of St Demetrius, Patron of Shepherds. On this day the shepherds are engaged for the coming year and the herds are given into their custody; as always in the case of important business, the occasion is followed by a feast, as they say, "for the blessing of the occasion", and by a joyous celebration.

The Day of the Reformation takes place on the thirty-first of October and is observed with great solemnity in Protestant communities.

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796 All Saints' Day, the first of November, is the time-limit for sowing the winter wheat, but St Martin's Day, on the eleventh, is important for more than one reason. The first frost and the first snow of the year are due on this day; whereupon the winter lights are lit for the first time, the stuffed geese yielding the delicious *foie gras* are killed, and it is also the time by which the grape-juice in the press-house has fermented and has turned into the new wine, just in time for the joyous St Martin's fairs.

777 796 Autumn slowly draws to its end. This means more leisure for the men and more work for the womenfolk, whose duty it is to utilize and preserve the products which the work of the men has created. These are also days of courtship, and from St Andrew's Day until Carnival, the girls are busy finding out by tricky little artifices who and what their future husbands will be. Molten lead poured into a pot of cold water will discover the occupation of the groom-to-be, while his name can be found out by hiding little slips of paper upon which names have been written in the dough of dumplings eaten with the evening meal.

St Lucia's Day, on the thirteenth of December, is another day when fortunes are told and omens are read. Groups of children known as "cacklers" go from house to house to wish the housewives great numbers of poultry and plenty of eggs:

> Lucia, Lucia, cackle, cackle,
> May your hens lay plenty of eggs,
> May your cow give plenty of milk,
> Lucia, Lucia, cackle, cackle...

If they are duly rewarded with food and sweets, the housewives should have no worries as to the fulfilment of the good wishes.

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Throughout Advent, Christmas, and about New Year's Day, many games of this nature are played, and old-fashioned custom follows old-fashioned custom in quick succession. One of the most characteristic of the latter is the Minstrel Circuit, which, perhaps more than any other Hungarian custom, has preserved traces of bygone heathen times. A number of young lads, sometimes only a few, sometimes as many as forty, gather to sing the minstrel songs of old, to make the round of the village, to call at every house, and to sing the fortune of the farmers. Some of the minstrels are supposed to represent animals ; one of them is the bull or the miraculous stag of Hungarian mythology. The bull or the stag is chained round the neck, and the end of the chain is attached to the hand of one of the minstrels. The rest of the minstrels are equipped with heavy wooden clubs, with which they beat out the rhythm of their monotonous recital. Still others carry a peculiar drum-like instrument made of an earthen pot covered with a tightly-fitted bladder, in the middle of which a reed is stuck. It is called the "bull" and gives off a peculiar droning noise when a wet finger is drawn across the bladder. The Minstrel circuit takes place on the twenty-fifth of December, that is, on the day of the winter solstice. Small wonder that in the monotonous chant of the versified rhymes of the minstrels there is a strange captivating quality which recalls the magic of ancient heathen rites, the saga of the miraculous stag, and the strength of unconscious beliefs which a thousand years of practising Christianity could not entirely obliterate.

To the farmer the minstrels "sing" a pair of fine oxen, a golden plough, and a golden whip ; to the housewife they "sing" a fine milch cow with calf, and a couple of fat pigs ; to the marriageable girl a desirable

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husband; and to the newly married a baby or a pair of sturdy twins.

Some time in the month of December the fattened pigs of the farm are slaughtered. Like harvest, it is one of the great days in the peasant household. Meat and lard, smoked ham, sausages, and that all-important staple of the Hungarian peasantry, bacon, that will fill the larder and feed the family throughout the winter months are deftly prepared in the course of a single day, in an effort in which every member of the household, the neighbours, and the friends of the family participate. It is a double holiday for the children. They are allowed to stay away from school to help their parents at home. If the yield is up to expectation, there is good reason for all to be happy. A fresh meal is prepared with the finest ingredients: a rich soup, a variety of meats, sausages, *sauerkraut*, sweets, and wine compose the festive meal in which all who have helped at the slaughter partake amidst an outburst of merry-making, contentment and happiness. Song follows song, to be interrupted only by a toast or a joke.

Christmas brings to the country one of the most deeply felt Hungarian holidays. After a day of fasting and tension during which presents are prepared and the fragrant Christmas pine is decorated, Christmas Eve, the anniversary of the miraculous birth, descends. The tiny coloured candles on the trees are lit, and in an atmosphere of peace and quiet happiness the presents are distributed by God's Angel. After the festive meal, Christmas carols are sung, children play themselves to sleep with their new toys, while the adults of the family and the older children prepare for Midnight Mass. It is an experience of rare charm and intensity to witness the small groups of peasants, bundled up in heavy winter

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furs and knitted woollen shawls, hurrying from all directions towards the snow-clad village church. The heavy steps creak on the newly fallen powdery snow; in the air of crystal purity the clear voice of the bells summons the faithful to come and pay homage to God Who has descended from Heaven to suffer for mankind on earth. 796 ●

On the following night the music of jingling bells is heard. It is the Bethlehem players who make their yearly round. Their plays are devoted to the Saviour's birth, but they also recall the ancient solstice rites; on the twenty-fifth of December the light of the life-spending sun begins to lengthen again. Introduced into medieval Hungary by the Franciscans, the Bethlehem play has become part of Hungarian folk-lore and has remained one of its most graceful customs. The simple words and tunes are very much the same all over the country, although the number and the sex of the actors vary in the different regions. Mostly they are boys; only here and there are the actors young girls led by an elderly woman. The play itself is usually of a religious character. The players, six boys representing King Herod, Joseph, two Angels, and two shepherds, are preceded by the envoy or runner, whose role it is to spy out the hospitable houses, visit in succession every farm, and wherever, in answer to the runner's call, the doors of a farmhouse have been swung open, we hear the melody of the age-old song: "An Angel from Heaven has descended to you, shepherds, shepherds." In some villages at the end of their circuit the Bethlehem players place their tiny crate at the altar of the parish church. We also find villages where there are comic Bethlehem plays, while in others, a quaint survival of the Middle Ages, the Bethlehem marionettes amuse the villagers.

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796 On the twenty-seventh of December the Hungarian peasant has his wine-casks blessed, whereupon he drinks the grace of St John, which is held to give strength and to ensure good health for him who has partaken of it.

The twenty-eighth of December is the collective day of the minor Saints who have no day of their own in the calendar. This day is observed in Hungary by a peculiar old folk-custom known as the "whipping of the innocent". The lads and men administer a sound whipping to the girls or their wives with a birch or willow twig which, by being kept in warm water indoors, has just begun to bud. The victim of the whipping, which is administered in the hours of dawn, is assured of becoming healthy, fresh of foot, beautiful, and fertile. The bud is the symbol of creation and of fertility.

883 Closer and closer we come to the end of the year. The merry days of Carnival are here, and it is the law of life that youngsters grow up, the grown-ups age, and those who have reached maturity settle down in married life to found a family to perpetuate the race and its traditions. Winter time is the time for courtship, and is there any better place for the boys to meet girls and for the girls to meet boys than in the spinnery?

Among all the quaint institutions of Hungarian folk-lore, we can hardly think of any quainter, more romantic, or merrier than the spinnery. Romantic it is naturally, because the origin and the immediate end of the spinnery are, as they always have been, romance. It is the age-honoured institution of finding a mate, which has, however, sometimes aroused the reasoned sobriety of the clergy, as has been mentioned in the chapter on folk-dancing. It is the institution into which the romance of St Ivan's Day has fled and in which the sacred flame of love is still burning as ever.

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659 sociation of Teachers, called the parents of his congregation
793 together to vote on whether the schools should be removed
661 from the jurisdiction of the Church. Two pads of paper were placed on the table, one for affirmative and the other for negative votes. All four hundred parents voted No. Two days later, the village council met to consider the same question. Rumors coursed through the town to the effect that the vote cast by the parents was to be nullified, and quickly an excited crowd gathered round the town hall, demanding that the will of the people be respected. The police were sent for, and they ordered the crowd to disperse. One officer drew his revolver and threatened to shoot. Thereupon a citizen named Kiralyfalvi entered the fray; there was a scuffle, and the policeman lay dead.

793 The pastor, Father Aszalos, seems not to have been present
687 when the shooting occurred. Nevertheless he became the central figure in a highly theatrical trial designed to prove that he and the "reactionary Hierarchy" were responsible for the incident. First the poor priest was taken, together with Kiralyfalvi and other villagers to the notorious prison maintained by the secret police at Andrássy ut 60, Budapest. The trial was then conducted without benefit of defense counsel. To the great surprise of nearly everyone—including, it is said, the officials of the Ministry of the Interior—Father Aszalos pleaded guilty. Indeed he went on to say that the real culprits were his religious superiors, who were always stirring up opposition to the government. Left to himself, he added, he would never have argued against the secularization of education. Nevertheless he was guilty because he had failed to heed his own conscience. The sentence of death imposed by the court was changed later to life imprisonment.

659 The observance of the Holy Year continued, despite stead-
●796 ily mounting obstacles, into the summer of 1948. It had be-

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come necessary to secure the approval of the government for each pilgrimage, and most gatherings were surrounded by cordons of police. On June 13 many tens of thousands gathered in Budapest to participate in devotions honoring Our Lady of Fatima. Someone called for a cheer in honor of the absent Cardinal. The crowd responded. Police cars thereupon appeared, and the throng was attacked and dispersed. Many persons were arrested; some were deported to labor camps. This pattern was followed thenceforth, so that the year of devotion petered out in fear, dispersal, and helplessness. It was obvious that the Communists had been neither impressed nor cowed.

Cardinal Mindszenty had every reason to suppose that action would soon be taken against him. On November 18 he issued his last Pastoral Letter, defending the celebrations in honor of the Blessed Virgin and making a profession of faith. It stated:

> Two of my predecessors were killed in action, two were robbed of all their possessions, one was taken prisoner and deported, one was assassinated. The greatest of them all went into exile. Karoly Ambrus visited and nursed the plague-stricken and himself died of their disease.
>
> Of all my predecessors, however, none was as devoid of all means as I am. So systematic and so adroit a net of propaganda untruths—lies disproved a hundred times and yet repeated a hundred times—was never spun round any of my seventy-eight precursors in office. I stand for God, the Church, and Hungary. This responsibility has been placed on me as a result of the fate which has been meted out to our nation, standing now alone, an orphan in the world. When what happens to me is compared with the sufferings of my people, it is seen to be of trifling consequence.

A brave man, sometimes impetuous but always zealously mindful of duty and of love, was going by reason of the might of evil into his own Gethsemane.